

## **1. Description**

**1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:** *Ryukyuan language family, Japonic, Amami-Okinawan, Southern Amami-Okinawan. Dialect is called 'Nago'.*

**1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):** *XUG [1]*

**1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):** *Central Okinawa; Central and Northern Okinawa Island, Iheya, Izena, Ie-jima, Sesoko Islands [1]*  
*The Okinawa Islands are in between 24N and 27N. Although deserts and savanna climates are common in this latitude, Okinawa is Subtropical in climate. A warm ocean current effects Okinawas climate. This current is known as the Kuroshio (Japan) current. Annual precipitation exceeds 3000 mm on Mt. Yonaha. These subtropical forests are not found anywhere else in Japan. There are about 100 various sized islands that were formed by the Earth's activity about 6,000 years ago. Yambaru only makes up 0.1 percent of Japans total land mass. [3]*

**1.4 Brief history:** *The Kunigami of Japan are made up of seven closely related people groups living in the Ryukyu Islands. This small chain of islands, which includes Okinawa, is located to the southwest of Japan, between Kyushu and northeastern Taiwan. The Ryukyuan peoples are of Japanese and southeast Asian descent. Their languages vary from island to island and their dialects from village to village. Although their dialects are all quite similar to Japanese, the tribes are not able to understand one another. Unfortunately, these languages are gradually being replaced by Japanese among the younger Kunigami. In times past, while under subjection to China and Japan, the Kunigami learned to be peaceful and accepting, while considered "backward" and "culturally less" by others. [2]*

**1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:** *Kunigami children enter school at eight or nine years of age and continue until they reach about sixteen. Today, there are three universities in the island region. Formerly, their goals included acquiring an abundance of livestock, food, and friends, and having as large a family as possible. Since the Japanese took control of the islands in 1879, these goals have changed. The Japanese introduced a system of education that discouraged students from speaking their native languages and encouraged them to speak Japanese. The students were even punished for speaking their own languages in class. Consequently, the native languages have been lost as the younger Kunigami have sought to identify with something they consider greater than themselves: a world class nation. Progress through education and contact with the outside world has moved the Kunigami from a self-sufficient lifestyle to one of dependence on outside factors. These factors include selling cash crops, making money through tourism, and working for soldiers on U.S. military bases. Many Kunigami have moved to larger islands or other countries in search of jobs and better living conditions. Because the Japanese consider the Kunigami second class citizens, the Ryukyu Islands have become "dumping ground" for the mainland's elderly and handicapped citizens. The Kunigami search for national pride and association with the rest of the world has not afforded them with the peace they desire. [2]*

**1.6 Ecology (natural environment):** *The Yambaru Mountain region spans the central part of Northern Okinawa. They span from Mt. Nishime in north, to Mt. Yonaha (the highest mountain in Okinawa at 503m), to Mt. Tamatuji in the south. Terrain is rugged with steep ravines cut into them. It contains many waterfalls and creeks. The landscape varies greatly from mountain to sea. There is a large variety in the forest provides a great habitat for many animals and insects. The Yambaru forest consists mostly of subtropical evergreen broad-leaved trees and plants. Yambaru has 1250 recorded plant species, 25% of all species found in all of Japan. 4 of Japans 12 endemic animal species are found here as well. Exceptions to the lush forest are the Asu-mori and some other nearby northern mountains, they contain mostly limestone. [3]*

**1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density:** *Estimated at 5,000 in 2004. [1]*

## **2. Economy**

**2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):** *Sweet potatoes and rice. [2]*

**2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:** *Squid, lobster, and other seafood. [7]*

**2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:** *Gil nets are used for subsistence. There are different mesh sizes for different targets. [7]*

**2.4 Food storage:**

**2.5 Sexual division of production:** *Entire families will often tend fields. Each individual will focus on a specific area or responsibility. The work seems to be divided among individuals, instead of sex. [2]*

**2.6 Land tenure:**

**2.7 Ceramics:**

**2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:**

**2.9 Food taboos:**

**2.10 Canoes/watercraft?**

## **3. Anthropometry**

**3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):**

**3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):**

## **4. Life History, mating, marriage**

**4.1 Age at menarche (f):**

**4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):**

**4.3 Completed family size (m and f):**

**4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):**

**4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):**

- 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:
- 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:
- 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:
- 4.9 Inheritance patterns: *Firstborn son inherits father's house once his parents die. Indeed, the firstborn son is allowed to live in his father's house after marriage. [2]*
- 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:
- 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:
- 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):
- 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized?
- 4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows")
- 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin):
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? *There are social lines between males and females. At celebrations, men stay separated from women, usually drinking rice wine or sake. Women in general are separated from their husbands in social situations. [2]*
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females:
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? *Respect is expected to be given to the elderly or elders. [6]*
- 4.24 Joking relationships?
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations:
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules:
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

#### Warfare/homicide

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:
- 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:
- 4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):
- 4.18 Cannibalism?

#### 5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):
- 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):
- 5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):
- 5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): *While the family is basically a male-dominated unit, women hold respected status. The age of the woman will determine level of respect. For example, an aged grandmother is greatly respected for her age and wisdom, while a young mother has more to learn. [6]*
- 5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:
- 5.8 Village and house organization: *Firstborn sons live in the houses of their father with their wife after marriage. [2]*
- 5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):
- 5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?
- 5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:
- 5.12 Trade:
- 5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

#### 6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

- 6.0 Time allocation to RCR: *There are many traditional festivals in the Kunigami culture. [4]*
- 6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): *Shamanistic practices continue in the culture, despite interaction with Japan. [2]*
- 6.2 Stimulants:
- 6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):
- 6.4 Other rituals: *If the kami are not appeased, it is believed they can bring harm to a family or individual. The people must seek permission from the kami before making any type of decision. [2]*
- 6.5 Myths (Creation):
- 6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

**6.7 Sex differences in RCR:** *The father of the house maintains the religious rituals in the home and cares for the ancestral tombs. The women serve as "mediators" between the kami and the people. [2]*

**6.8 Missionary effect:** *Buddhism presumably acquired from Japan. [2]*

**6.9 RCR revival:**

**6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:** *The people believe that the spirits must be regularly invited back into the lives of their descendants so that they may continue to exist. For this reason, each person considers himself a continuation of the life of his family. The people also believe that unseen powers known as kami control the ancestral spirits and other areas, including the sea and land. The ancestral spirits are honored on a community level, but the kami are worshipped privately in the homes. [2] Obon is a 3 day holiday set aside during the summer to honor deceased ancestors. During this period, family members celebrate the return of ancestral spirits by gathering together, feasting and praying. Some label the events of obon as ancestor worship and think it in terms of Christian rites. This is something of a misnomer and a more appropriate term might be ancestor veneration. This practice of honoring the ancestors has been around for centuries. Many Okinawans believe that after people die, they continue to exist in the spiritual world where they sometime continue to exert powerful influences over the living. [5]*

**6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?**

**6.12 Is there teknonymy?**

**6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.):** *Most sources consider the Kunigami to be Buddhist; however, traditional shamanistic practices are still prevalent. This means that they believe in many unseen gods, demons, and ancestral spirits. The spirits of their ancestors are believed to live in the tombs where they were buried. [2]*

## **7. Adornment**

**7.1 Body paint:**

**7.2 Piercings:**

**7.3 Haircut:**

**7.4 Scarification:**

**7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):** *There are some special clothes in Okinawa. Those are like "YUKATA". Hand-woven and dyed fabrics made in Okinawa. In these days, Okinawan textiles are not worn by everyone. The first Okinawa textiles was probably abaca clothes, which along with often fast-fiber cloth such as ramie and sisal was form by commoners. Cotton and silk were reserved for the nobility. Colors were from natural dyestuffs such as plants(indigo blue) tree barks (yellow, black, brown) certain woods (brown, red)and ferruginous mud (brown, black). A traditional garment dyed using the "bingata" method may involve cut stencils or hand coloring. A "Kasuri" style garment involves weaving and dyeing techniques developed in Okunawa. [4]*

**7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:** *Okinawan woven textile designs are mostly geometric, reflecting the structure of the weave. Within Okinawa there are distinctive fabrics, developed partly as a result of the distance between the islands that make up the prefecture. The city of Naha is known for "bingata, the island Kumejima for "Kasuri", patterned handspun silk cloth in deep brown and yellow patterns, and the Miyako Islands for indigo dyed ramie cloth "jofu" with 'kasuri" pattern of tiny crosses that form larger designs. [4]*

**7.7 Sex differences in adornment:**

**7.8 Missionary effect:** *Okinawans have intertwined the cultures of the Chinese and Japanese into their own, producing a multitude of colorful holidays and festivals. There are very bright and lively pageants, parades and festivals. A popular festival is the "Tsunahiki" or Sports Day. This celebration takes place in October and features a giant tug-of-war between the eastern and western sides of Naha, Okinawa's capital city. [6]*

**7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:**

## **8. Kinship systems**

**8.1 Sibling classification system:**

**8.2 Sororate, levirate:**

**8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):**

**9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):**

- *Dialect is called NAGO. [1]*

- *Inherent intelligibility is generally impossible or very difficult with other Ryukyuan languages and Japanese. Ryukyu languages are 62% to 70% cognate with Tokyo dialect of Japanese. The younger the generation, the more fluently they speak Japanese (1981 Hattori in Wurm and Hattori). Those under 20 are mainly monolingual in Japanese (T. Fukuda SIL 1989). Those over 50 use Kunigami at home among themselves but can understand and use Japanese. Those 20 to 50 can understand Kunigami, but mainly use Japanese at home and work. [1]*

- *The Firstborn son is responsible for managing the rest of the family and its finances long before his parents die. [2]*

- *Crime seems relatively low because of the stigma against "dishonoring one's family". [2]*

- *Cherry Blossom Festival is in Nago city in late January. As Okinawa is located in the warmest part of Japan, Okinawa is the first place where people can enjoy full cherry blossoms. [4]*

- *Muchi(which means devil rice cake),opens in all the part of Okinawa in the late January.In this festival parents pray for the children`s health and well being with rice cakes wrapped in fragrant leaves of kuba.Because rice cakes are belived to be a protection against devil. [4]*

- In early February, there is a festival called Sixteen day festival. People of the same kin gather at their family tomb for a whole day to remember and entertain the soul of their ancestors with lots of fine dishes, dance and folk songs. [4]
- Harii, which means the dragon boat opens in the all part of Okinawa in the middle of June. This is a festival for people who want good fishing. People pray to the sea God. [4]
- Usudeku opens in Mainland in Okinawa and in late September. On the day full moon villagers offer rice cakes covered with red beans to their family. [4]
- Naha festival opens in Naha on 10th of October. On 9th-Oct, from 6.00pm all the traffics are closed on Kokusai Street and everyone enjoys the parades with the flags. [4]

#### **Numbered references**

1. Ethnologue Report [[http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_language.asp?code=xug](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=xug)]
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3. NPO Kunigami Tourism Association [<http://kuta-okinawa.org/en/index.htm>]
4. Okinawan Language Cultures [[http://www.virtualokinawa.com/about\\_okinawa/articles/culture.html](http://www.virtualokinawa.com/about_okinawa/articles/culture.html)]
5. Okinawan Culture [[http://youngokinawans.org/Joomla\\_YOH/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=4&Itemid=16](http://youngokinawans.org/Joomla_YOH/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4&Itemid=16)]
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7. Ehraf World Cultures [<http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu>]